

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8816

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 3217

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PGOV, PINT,ES

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT EXPLAINS GOVERNMENT'S RECENT ACTION TO
DIPLOMATIC CORPS

REF: SAN SALVADOR 3193 AND PREVIOUS

USCINCSO PASS POLAD

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT MOLINA MET WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
ON AUGUST 12, AT HIS INITIATIVE, TO PRESENT THE OFFICIAL GOES
VERSION OF RECENT EVENTS INVOLVING DISTURBANCES AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF EL SALVADOR (UES), THE STUDENT MARCH OF JULY 30 AND THE SUBSE-
QUENT OCCUPATION OF THE METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL IN SAN SALVADOR
(SAN SALVADOR 3120). IN A NINETY-MINUTE PRESENTATION, THE
PRESIDENT GAVE BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND A DAY-BY-DAY SUMMARY
OF THE VARIOUS DEVELOPMENTS AS VIEWED FROM THE CASA PRESIDENCIAL.
MINISTER OF DEFENSE ROMERO WAS CALLED ON TO DESCRIBE THE DETAILS
OF THE JULY 30 PROTEST MARCH, HOW AND WHY THE SECURITY FORCES
ACTED AS THEY DID, AND THE RESULTS THEREOF. THE SESSION WAS
THEN THROWN OPE FOR ANY QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE. NONE OF
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REAL SUBSTANCE WAS ASKED. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT MOLINA'S WORDS WERE ESSENTIALLY THE SAME AS THOSE IN HIS AUGUST 1 PRESS CONFERENCE (SAN SALVADOR 3079), AS AMENDED BY HIS DESCRIPTION TO THE AMBASSADOR (SAN SALVADOR 3193). HE REITERATED HIS BELIEF IN AN INTERNATIONAL SUBVERSIVE CONSPIRACY, PERPETRATED BY COMMUNISTS (ZBY WHATEVER NAME YOU WANT TO CALL THEM"), WHICH HOPES TO CREAT CHAOS AND DISORDER THAT EVENTUALLY MIGHT TOPPLE THIS DEMOCRATIC REGIME. REFERRING TO STORIES OF THE MARCH THAT APPEARED IN THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS AS GROOSLY EXAGGERATED, THE PRESIDENT SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WANTED TO BE CERTAIN THE OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS KNEW AND UNDERSTOOD HIS GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. THE PRESIDENT VIGOROUSLY DEFENDED EVERYTHING THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS AGENTS DID. FIRST, THEY TRIED EVERY MEANS TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION WITH THE STUDENTS AND THEIR ALLIES THROUGH WARNINGS OF EVERY TYPE. WHEN ALL FAILED, THE GOVERNMENT HAD NO OTHER RECOURSE IN THE FACE OF WILLFULL DISOBEDIENCE OF THE LAW AND AN ARMED ATTACK ON GOVERNMENT FORCES, THAN TO MEET FORCE WITH FORCE.

3. MOD ROMERO'S DESCRIPTION OF THE MARCH ITSELF, AND ITS VIOLENT ENDING, WAS IMPLY AN EXPANSION OF HIS EXPLANATION TO THE AMBASSADOR. HE ASKED THE ASSEMBLED DIPLOMATS AND ATTACHES TO PUT THEMSELVES IN THE PLACE OF THE GOVERNMENT TROOPS, CONFRONTING AN ARMED AND PROVOCATIVE MASS OF STUDENTS, RECEIVING NOT ONLY VILE INSULTS BUT ALSO ROCKS, MOLOTOV COCKTAILS AND BULLETS. AS THE BODY RESPONSIBLE FOR MAINTAINING PUBLIC ORDER AND SECURITY, ROMERO CLAIMED THE SECURITY FORCES HAD TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AS THEY DID. HE SAID THAT NO ONE REGRETTEED MORE THEN HE AND HIS FELLOW MILITARY THAT ONE DEATH AND FIVE INJURIES RESULTED. (HE CLAIMED HOWEVER THAT THE DEMONSTRATOR WHO DIED FROM WOUNDS THE FOLLOWING DAY--THE SECOND DEATH--WAS WOUNDED BY A WEAPON NOT IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ARSENAL.)

4. PRESIDENT MOLINA CONCLUDED THE DESCRIPTION OF THE MARCH BY SAYING THAT OF THE TWENTY-THREE PERSONS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY, TWELVE WERE RELEASED WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS AND TEN OTHERS TWO DAYS LATER. HE DISMISSED ACCOUNTS OF LARGE NUMBERS OF "DISAPPEARANCES" BY SAING THAT GOVERNMENT KNOWS NOTHING BOUNT ANY THAT IT DID NOT TAKE INTO CUSTODY. HE ADDED THAT A TACTIC OF AGITATORS UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES IS TO MAKE EXAGGERATED CLAIMS OF LARGE NUMBERS

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MISSING TO KEEP PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT BQUGIVING THE FALSE IMPRESSION THAT IT IS HOLDING THE UNACCOUNTED FOR PERSONS ILLEGALLY. HE THEN GAVE A DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE OCCUPATION OF THE DOWNTOWN SAN SALVADOR CATHEDRAL, PARTICULARLY OF NEGOTIATIONS CARRIED OUT BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THOSE IN THE CHURCH, MOSTLY THROUGH THE GOOD OFFICES OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF SAN SALVADOR AND THE NUNCIO. THIS TIME, THE PRESIDENT SAID, HE AND HIS ADVISORS WERE DETERMINED NOT TO USE FORCE. (HE MADE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE MARCH,

WHICH THREATENED OTHER PERSONS AND PROPERTY, AND THE OCCUPATION, WHICH, WHILE IT BLOCKED TRAFFIC AND CITIZENS ACCESS TO ONE STREET, WAS NEVERTHELESS ESSENTIALLY PACIFIC.) MOLINA LISTED THE DEMANDS OF THOSE IN THE CATHEDRAL. ONE BY ONE HE EXPLAINED WHY HIS GOVERNMENT COULD NOT MMET THEM. ONE DEMAND CALLED FOR THE FORMATION OF AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION COMMISSION. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE WAS AT FIRST FAVORABLY DISPOSED TO THE IDEA, UNTIL HE WAS TOLD THAT THE COMMISSION HAD TO BE COMPOSED TO TWO GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AND THREE FROM THE OPPOSITION. HE TURNED DOWN THE DEMAND, SAYING THAT IN A CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC THERE ARE INSTITUTIONS (PROSECUTOR'S OFFICES AND COURTS) WHOSE PURPOSE IN BEING IS TO DO WHAT THE SUGGESTED SPECIAL COMMISSION WOULD ATTEMPT. SUCH A COMMISSION WOULD THUS USURP THE CONSTITUTION. HE ADDED THAT IN HIS OWN EXPERIENCE, THESE COMMISSIONS ALWAYS FAILED, ESPECIALLY WHEN INTRODUCED INTO SUCH A HIGHLY POLITICAL SUBJECT AS THIS.

5. IN THE QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD, THE MAJORITY OF THE QUESTIONS WENT LITTLE BEYOND EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION FOR THE CHANCE TO HEAR THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL EXPLANATION. THE ONLY QUERY OF SUBSTANCE WAS FOR INFORMATION ABOUT REPORTED RED CROSS EFFORTS TO INVESTIGATE THE INCIDENT. THE PRESIDENT CONFIRMED THAT HE HAD RECEIVED A REQUEST FROM THE SALVADORAN RED CROSS PRESIDENT FOR PERMISSION TO VISIT THOSE IN HOSPITALS OR CUSTODY. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD IMMEDIATELY GRANTED PERMISSION, PARTICULARLY SINCE THERE WAS NO LONGER ANY ONE IN CUSTODY. MOLINA SAID HE WAS SURPRISED TO HEAR THAT THE NATIONAL BODY HAD NOT FOLLOWED THROUGH ON ITS OPPORTUNITY TO ENTER THE HOSPITALS AND JAILS. HE SAID HE WAS TOLD THAT IT HAD NOT DONE SO, PREFERRING TO WAIT OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS REP. HE NOW UNDERSTANDS THAT A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS HAD ARRIVED AND WAS VISITING THE HOSPITALS AND JAILS THAT DAY.

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6. COMMENT: BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND THE MOD WERE CAPABLE AND FORCEFUL IN THEIR PRESENTATIONS. NEITHER USED NOTES. BOTH DEMONSTRATED KNOWLEDGE IN GREAT DETAIL. THE MEETING WAS CORDIAL AND FRIENDLY ON ALL COUNTS. IT WAS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE WHEN THE FOMIN SAID THE PRESIDENT WOULD WELCOME ANY QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR. GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE AUDIENCE, IT WAS NOT A NPRPRISE THAT NO CHALLENGING QUESTIONS RESULTED. ON THE RED CROSS REQUEST, AN EMBOFF HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN TOLD BY THE LOCAL CHAPTER PRESIDENT THAT HE HAD MADE TWO OFFICIAL REQUESTS. THE FIRST, FOR ADMISSION TO THE HOSPITALS TO INTERVIEW THE WOUNDED, WAS GRANTED. A SECOND REQUEST, TO ENTER MILITARY AND CIVILIAN JAILS TO ASCERTAIN HOW MANY HAD BEEN ARRESTED OR MISTREATED, WAS STILL PENDING AT THAT TIME. THE RED CROSS PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE NATIONAL RED CROSS COULD HAVE LEGITIMATELY FORCED THE GOVERNMENT TO GRANT THIS REQUEST, AND FOR THIS REASON

HE HAD ASKED THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS TO ENTER THE PICTURE.
MOSKOWITZ

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